

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Central Park

AND/OR COMMON

Central Park

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

New York City

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

17th and 18th

STATE

New York

CODE
36

COUNTY

New York

CODE

061

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☒ DISTRICT☐ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☐ YES: RESTRICTED☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ MUSEUM☐ COMMERCIAL☒ PARK☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ RELIGIOUS☐ GOVERNMENT☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ MILITARY☐ OTHER**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME New York City adm. by Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs

STREET & NUMBER

Arsenal Building, 830 Fifth Avenue

CITY, TOWN

New York City

VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

New York County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT
☒ GOOD
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

One of the important things which sets Central Park apart from so many other parks, which simply grew on their sites, is the fact that, despite the great size, it was the result of a carefully laid-out plan. Not merely content to have their plan win in competition, Olmsted and Vaux literally lived with it. During construction they moved their families into a building at the northern end of the park. In this way they were able to build creatively, always ready to modify it to achieve the best results as new conditions arose on the site. Their imaginations were constantly challenged to take advantage of the functional and aesthetic possibilities as they arose.

It has been said that Central Park literally brought the open country into the heart of the City. Confronted with a squatters' town of some three hundred hovels set in an open plain interspersed with out-croppings of rock, swamps and meandering waterways, Olmsted and Vaux created their masterful and influential landscape design. They not only introduced such features as mounds and lakes; they also embellished natural features already present such as rock to further enhance the scene. The end result was romantic and picturesque in the extreme and needed only such naturalistic touches as sheep grazing in a meadow, swans gliding on a pond, rustic trellised arbors and stone arches. All structures, they felt, should blend harmoniously with this natural setting and for this reason bridges and buildings whether of stone, wood, or iron were made intentionally picturesque in the best Victorian tradition.

The creation of the park as an artistic masterpiece had to be laid on a firm functional foundation. It was first necessary to construct a drainage system, 95 miles in length, which channelled the underground streams, carried off excess surface water, and allowed fresh water from the reservoir to flow into the lakes. Confronted with the problem of reconciling five different types of circulation which cross and recross each other at different levels, Olmsted and Vaux met the challenge with great originality and imagination. These five elements of circulation include: footpaths, bridle paths, carriage drives, waterways and the functionally effective sunken transverse roads. Extending a park up the heart of the City for some 50 blocks (approximately 2-1/2 miles) would of necessity require that transverse roads be permitted to cross it at stated intervals. This problem was solved by depressing these roads considerably beneath the general surface of the park so that no one walking in the park was aware of the east-west traffic rumbling along below it. This was not a completely original idea as such, there having been other precedents for it.

Considering that these transverse roads were built for carriages, carts and drays, people today are amazed at the foresight of those who conceived this feature which serves the heavy flow of motor traffic so well. Picturesque serpentine carriage drives, which discouraged the racing of trotters, ran primarily north and south. They crossed unobtrusively over the transverse roads on bridges which were scarcely noticed by the carriages drawn by horses which were a conspicuous feature of the afternoon drive when New Yorkers turned out in force to see and be seen.

(continued)

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1857-1866

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Frederick Law Olmsted
Calvert Vaux

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Central Park occupies a prominent position in the history of the park movement in the United States because it dramatized the need for, and gave an impetus to, the Nation's urban park movement.

In the 1840's farsighted citizens of New York began a movement to develop a large park in the heart of the rapidly expanding city. Two of the leaders of this movement were Andrew Jackson Downing, America's first great professional landscape gardener, and William Cullen Bryant, the poet and editor.

From 1851, when the city was authorized to buy land for the park, until 1857, the park was under City control. In 1857, because of mismanagement an independent park commission was established.

Appointment of Frederick Law Olmsted as superintendent of Central Park in the fall of 1857 marked a turning point in the park's development. Olmsted and his business partner, Calvert Vaux, the English born landscape architect, entered a plan in the competition for a park design in 1858. Their design won first prize, and, shortly after, Olmsted became the park's chief architect and Vaux consulting architect for the park.

This prize-winning design reflected the influence of the close contact which these men had with Downing. It decreed that the park should have a natural or forest atmosphere and that all architectural features should be subordinated to that premise. The idea of a natural area immediately appealed to the people, and in 1859 the park was extended to 110th Street. By 1866, most of the park had been completed.

History

Central Park was the first large-scale public park in the nation that was designed and constructed according to a plan. It was to be a place where all people could find physical relief from the pressures of an urban society.

As New York City was transformed under the impact of the Industrial Revolution and massive immigration from Europe during the first half of the 19th century, the shortcomings of the grid plan became evident. Little provision for new squares, or parks was made and the green spaces that were created were either for private use, such as Gramercy Park and St. John's Park, or were cemeteries and converted graveyards like Washington Square.

(continued)

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10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 840

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 8	5 8 8 6 2 0	4 5 1 6 5 3 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1 8	5 8 5 9 1 0	4 5 1 3 3 0 0

B	1 8	5 8 6 6 6 0	4 5 1 2 9 0 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D	1 8	5 8 7 8 7 0	4 5 1 6 9 4 0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at the intersection of 59th Street and Fifth Avenue, the boundary of Central Park runs north along the west curb of Fifth Avenue to 110th Street, west along the south curb of 110th Street to Central Park West, south along the east curb of Central Park West to 59th Street and east along 59th Street to the point of beginning. All structures and landscape features within the park which were designed, either as part of the original plan or were added as important elements in

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES (continued)

STATE	CODE	COUNTY
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY
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Landmark May 23, 1963
Designated:

Boundary Certified: Jan 6, 1978 date

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Patricia Heintzelman, Architectural Historian, Landmark Review Project

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. 8/14/75

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW

TELEPHONE

523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE
D. C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ____

STATE ____

LOCAL ____

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

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Some of the many footpaths which laced the park in all directions followed the drives at certain points so that the pedestrian could also have a good view of the passing parade. A series of handsome arches of brick, stone and iron permitted the pedestrian to pass under the drives without crossing them and likewise to pass over the independent but interlacing system of bridle paths which they crossed at various points.

The waterways, whether lakes or streams, are traversed at various points by bridges for the pedestrian permitting the rowboat on the lake to pass unimpeded over the water. Today the functional plan of the park remains so effective that one barely thinks of it--an unconscious tribute to the mastery of the overall design of Olmsted and Vaux.

Among the structures which blend most harmoniously with the site are the bridges which carry the east and west drives over the transverse roads, the footpaths over lakes, and the smaller bridges or arches which generally carry the footpaths over the bridle paths or the drives over footpaths. These are constructed of a wide range of materials including wood, rough-faced stonework, dressed stonework, brick, and even cast iron. Of those bridges which exemplify the materials mentioned above are some which are more or less typical of the approximately 50 bridges and arches in the park today: the wood footbridges at the Ramble, the bold faced, picturesque stone archway known as the Glen Span at the entrance to the Ravine, the rather formal Trefoil Arch of dressed stonework at the eastern end of the Lake, which passes under the East Drive, and the Willowdell Arch of brick trimmed with stone, east of The Mall, which also passes under the East Drive. Several extremely handsome cast-iron bridges also adorn the park, most notable of which is the recently restored Bow Bridge with its wide low span which crosses the Lake at mid-point. These arches and bridges are an important part of that planning which makes circulation in the park so safe and so attractive.

The twenty gates in the wall around Central Park were dedicated to the people of New York City. The gates were named in 1862 by the Park Commissioners honoring: Artists, Merchants, Scholars, Cultivators (changed to Farmers), Warriors, Mariners, Engineers, Hunters, Fishermen, Woodmen, Miners, Explorers (changed to Pioneers), Inventors, Foreigners (changed to Strangers), Boys, Girls, Women, Children, and All Saints. Basically simple openings in the wall, the gates do not emphasize architecture at the expense of landscape.

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The Mall and the Terrace, also called the Esplanade, were an integral part of the original Greensward Plan. Stretching across the lower section of the park from 65th Street to 73rd Street, it is the one formal element in an otherwise picturesque plan. The Mall, which was planted with four rows of elm trees, was planned so that its vista would terminate with a view of the Belvedere. The physical termination point of the Mall as one walks northward is the Esplanade or Terrace, constructed in two levels, at the lower edge of the Lake. The pedestrian can choose one of two ways to descend to the lower Terrace: either by crossing the roadway and using one of two wide flights of stairs lined with impressive carved railings; or by descending through the gallery and arcade beneath the roadway. At both levels the Terrace is outlined by piers and balustrades of carved Albert freestone. The imaginative detailing of stylized foliation and birds was designed by Jacob Wrey Mould in keeping with Victorian prototype. The ceiling of the gallery is lined with colored Minton tiles.

The dominant feature of the lower Terrace is the Bethesda Fountain, designed by Emma Stebbins. A large bronze figure of the Angel of the Waters rises above a basin supported on a pedestal carved with four youthful figures representing Health, Purity, Temperance and Peace.

Olmsted and Vaux felt strongly that any buildings in the park should serve a secondary function--the landscape and the preservation of the natural setting being their foremost considerations. At the same time, they designed a number of structures which enhanced the appearance of the park. In the text for "Greensward," their winning plan for the park, they said: "... we conceive that all such architectural structures should be confessedly subservient to the main idea, and that nothing artificial should be obtruded in view as an ultimatum of interest. The idea of the park itself should always be uppermost in the mind of the beholder."

Calvert Vaux was trained as an architect in England and came to this country to work for Andrew Downing, the landscape architect whose writings popularized the Italian villa style and the planned environment. Vaux's interest in landscaping grew out of this association. To him was entrusted the design of many of the park's structures after he and Olmsted were appointed park architects. Jacob Wrey Mould, who had also been born and trained as an architect in England, began assisting Vaux in the design of park structures about 1858. Vaux is generally credited with the overall designs for the buildings and for many of the bridges, while Mould has been credited with the elegant details of the cast-iron bridges and with the refinements of the Terrace.

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The park buildings were generally designed in the Victorian Gothic style, built of red brick trimmed with stone and surmounted by steeply pitched roofs. Those structures built of cast iron made excellent use of that material, being light and graceful in form and enhanced by delicate detail. Although many schemes for buildings in the park have been proposed over the years, most of them have fortunately not been realized. The actual number of buildings in the park remains relatively small, and a number of the original Vaux and Mould structures of the 1860's and 1870's remain standing, although many were willfully destroyed through conscious neglect.

Sculpture has also found its way into the park. The 19th-century residents of the City, who loved monuments, felt that the park was an appropriate place for them. Works by such noted sculptors as Augustus St. Gaudens, John Quincy Adams Ward, Olin Levi Warner, Daniel Chester French and Paul Manship, as well as many others, can be found in the Park.

Many modern additions of playgrounds and fields have altered the original plan. Neglect has caused the disappearance of species of trees, landscape elements and park buildings. The staff of gardeners and assistants, always inadequate, gradually dwindled to nothing and it is only recently that any maintenance staff has been permanently assigned to the park. From 1934 the Park Department no longer had a landscape architect. The most serious invasion of the park took the form of gifts, several were personal memorials. The most intrusive of these is the Wollman Skating Rink and the Loula D. Lasker Pool-Rink.

Plans are now underway to reconstruct the Woolman Rink into a more naturalistic form. The process of restoring the landscape features is hampered by a chronic lack of funding. The southeastern area is at least being studied for restoration and a landscape architect is currently employed by the Parks Department. Despite changes, Central Park remains a notable example of Olmsted and Vaux's landscape design, contributing as much to the City and its people today as it did in its earliest years.

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In the 1840's, after the cholera and malaria epidemics of the 1830's, a serious campaign was begun to create a park to benefit all the people of New York. One of the earliest and most influential leaders in this campaign was William Cullen Bryant, the powerful journalist who began to write editorials in favor of a park in his newspaper, the New York Evening Post, on July 3, 1844.

Another important voice that called for the establishment of a park was Andrew Jackson Downing, the Hudson River landscape architect and author who was internationally recognized for his books and for his creative landscaping. Downing's proposal which appeared in The Horticulturist in August 1851 was more ambitious than Bryant's suggestion of using Jones' Woods along the East River between 68th and 77th Streets. Downing advocated the creation of a central park of at least 500 acres surrounding the receiving reservoir of the Croton Water Works near 80th Street. Today, the Great Lawn occupies the site of that old reservoir.

The creation of a park had been an issue in Ambrose C. Kingsland's winning mayoralty campaign of 1850. On April 5, 1851, he sent a letter to the Common Council urging that land be set aside for a park. Three months later a bill was introduced in the State Legislature which allowed the City to acquire the land at Jones' Wood as a park. Opposition arose from real estate developers and the Board of Aldermen chose a more central tract of land extending from 59th to 106th Streets between Fifth and Eighth Avenues. Even though the statute which made Jones' Woods the site of the park was still valid, the State government authorized the City to begin acquisition of the Central Park area. An addition extending Central Park north to 110th Street was made in 1859 when it was discovered that the rocky terrain was too rough to develop profitably according to the inflexible grid plan.

It was not until the financial panic of 1857 that major work was begun. Thousands of men were unemployed at this time when the state of affairs within the City was unsettled. During the year, a number of civil disturbances had erupted. Mayor Fernando Wood used the construction of the park as the safety valve that would release the pressure on his administration, providing Wood with a source for thousands of jobs.

In 1857, Egbert L. Viele was appointed Chief Engineer and charged with laying out the park. His topographical study of Manhattan Island became a classic of its type, serving as a primary source for locating hidden and forgotten features of the island. It was to Viele that Frederick Law Olmsted reported after he had been elected Superintendent of the Park on September 11, 1857. Olmsted, at that time under the authority of Viele, was in charge of policing the park, seeing that its regulations were enforced, and that the work of clearing the area was carried out. He had a background in engineering, which he had studied for two-and-a-half years with

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Frederick A. Barton. His involvement in scientific farming in Owego, New York, and while living on Staten Island, his classic studies of the southern states for the New York Times, and his travels through Europe had stimulated his interest in landscape architecture and its role in urban development.

The Park Commission announced a public competition for a design for the park in October. It was then that Calvert Vaux, an architect who had worked with A. J. Downing, approached Olmsted and suggested that they submit a plan together. Olmsted had first met Vaux through Downing and was undoubtedly familiar with the work he had done with Downing on the Smithsonian Institution and the Capitol at Washington, D.C. Olmsted was initially hesitant wishing to speak first with Viele to find out whether he had any objections. When Viele indicated that it did not matter to him if Olmsted entered the competition, Vaux and Olmsted began their collaboration. They anonymously submitted their design, entitled, "Greensward," and were awarded first prize in April 1858. Olmsted was appointed Architect-in-Chief of the new park, and Vaux became Assistant to the Architect-in-Chief.

The concept of Central Park as envisioned by these two men is the result of certain ideas and attitudes about man's relationship to Nature and the City and the effects that they have upon him. The park not only incorporates certain landscape traditions, but it also reflects the intellectual climate in which it was conceived. The rise of Transcendentalism as a force in American intellectual life under the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson had contributed greatly to a native literature and painting which had its roots in the 1820's. Olmsted and Vaux were not members of any particular sect or philosophical school, but they did share with their contemporaries a belief in the salutary effect of Nature upon man; that is, that the future health of society and of our cities depended on the spiritual health of the people which could be insured by re-establishing their link with Nature that had been broken by the rapid growth and industrialization of urban centers.

Olmsted's design decreed that the park should have a rural nature and that all architectural and engineering features should be subordinated to that premise. That fresh concept governed the development of Central Park, and the idea subsequently became basic in the growth of the urban park movement in the United States.

By October 1858, under Olmsted's supervision, 2,500 men labored in the park. Paths, roads, bridges, lakes and planting were all well underway before winter slowed the work. During 1859, Olmsted greatly advanced the development of the park, so much so that the public became quickly enraptured with its new possession. Thousands of people began to enjoy the park's benefits--not only the rural atmosphere, but also the paths, bridle trails, band concerts, and in winter, ice skating. And in 1859 the park was extended to 110th Street, although the city did not acquire the land until 1863. By 1866, most of the park had been completed and it was estimated that an average of 20,000 people visited the park every day. The city had spent

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\$9,750,000 on the park but as an investment it had proved itself. The assessed property values of the land surrounding the park had increased by \$34,600,000 to \$61,000,000, and the city had received an increased \$1,000,000 in tax revenues.

Olmsted, who had already resigned from and then rejoined the park several times, remained associated with Central Park until 1878, when politicians brought an end to his long and beneficial influence upon the rural retreat. Vaux remained in New York, serving as Landscape Architect to the Park Department from 1881 to 1883 and again from 1888 until he drowned in Gravesend Bay in 1895.

By 1873 it was estimated that four to five million trees, shrubs and vines had been planted. Only 42 species of trees were found growing on the park site prior to the clearing, by 1873 there were 402 species of deciduous trees and shrubs, 149 non-coniferous evergreens and American plants in open ground, 81 conifers, and 815 hardy perennials and alpine.

Central Park, as events proved, did more than just provide a country-like area for New York's masses. Even before fully finished, the park stimulated in tremendous fashion outdoor recreation. Again, the park greatly increased land values in the area surrounding it. More importantly, the art of landscape architecture found its birth in Central Park. Finally, the park influenced many cities to create similar open and landscaped areas, and the great parks in Brooklyn, Boston, Chicago, and countless other urban centers, are descended from Central Park.

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the gradual growth and development of the park are considered part of the landmark. These include the Arsenal, the Zoo, Bethesda Fountain, Belvedere Castle, the Lake, the Sheep Meadow, The Mall, Harlem Meer, the Dairy, Friedsam Memorial Carousel, The Obelisk, Kerbs Memorial Model Boat House, Swedish School House, Delacorte Theatre, Metropolitan Museum of Art and all of the arches and bridges created as part of the circulation system through the park. Modern tennis courts, skating rinks, cemented playgrounds, sports fields and parking areas which disrupt the landscape design, and maintenance sheds and structures of no architectural merit or part of the total design do not contribute to the national significance of the landmark.